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ABSTRACT

Strayer College in Washington, D.C., offers freshman composition as an individualized, self-paced course that uses instructors as tutors. To determine if there is any relationship between the students' preference of instructors and the teaching procedures those instructors use, a questionnaire was developed focusing on teacher fulfillment of previously agreed upon procedures. The only variables in the study were the teachers themselves. Students completed the form during the next to last week of the term. The results showed that all of the students of some instructors would choose the same instructor again, while only 35% of the students of another instructor would choose that instructor again. Students appeared to consider an instructor's returning to them, rather than simply monitoring their independent work, as most important in an individualized setting. Instructor's explaining errors students made on tests and explaining reading materials students did not understand were also important. These three most important characteristics stressed a student preference for a personalized, nurturing atmosphere. (HTH)

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LIKE TO LEARN! WHY NOT?

Results of a Study Analyzing the Teaching Procedures of Instructors Students Most Prefer

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970's the English department of Strayer College has offered freshman composition as an individualized, self-paced course, using instructors as tutors who work with students on a one to one basis. Part of the logistics of our structure includes having all students register for these courses directly through the English department. When students come to register, English faculty provide them with details of when classes are offered and who is teaching each class. Students then select the time and/or instructor they prefer. My 10 years of helping students to register in this manner have made a number of things very clear, one of which is this: Students have very definite preferences when offered a choice of instructors for their individualized freshman composition course. Some students have developed such an attachment to a given instructor that they will accept virtually no alternative. I have seen students change their entire class schedules, drop conflicting classes, and go to other extremes involving their jobs or home situations just to get into a particular instructor's section. On the other hand, the reverse situation has sometimes occured, too. There have been students who, before even clearing the doorway, will announce, "I'll take anyone except _____!" Their vehement opposition to a given instructor has even led some to refuse to take the course that term unless they can have "someone else."

Fortunately, the last example has occurred rarely among the approximately 10,000 registrants I've worked with. Most students, when given a list of instructors, remain calm and relatively neutral. Yet their preferences still can be seen, often simply by noting that there are always some instructors whose classes fill almost immediately, and others whose courses just never seem to draw, no matter what.

I operate under the assumption that it is desirable for students to want to learn. That is not to say that I feel learning cannot take place without enjoyment; I think

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it can. I simply feel that it is advisable to create the most positive learning environment possible, and if certain instructors contribute to such an atmosphere, so much the better.

Therefore, avoiding the issue of personality factors, I decided to develop a tool to try to determine if there is any relationship between the students' preference of instructors and the teaching procedures those instructors use.

MATERIALS

Working with our director of institutional research, I developed a questionnaire, a copy of which is on page 3. The student information at the top and the unscaled questions on the back were, with one exception, ignored for the purpose of this study and were included only to elicit information helpful to the English department in general. The one key question, however, is question number two on the back of the form: "If the opportunity presented itself, would you select this instructor again?" But more of that later.

The thirteen questions on the rating scale were developed to focus on teaching procedures only, then. And these procedures are ones which the English department as a whole has concurred are appropriate. That is to say, it had long been agreed that instructors should conduct classes the entire period prescribed, make students aware of course requirements, give homework assignments, explain material, and so on. These procedures were neither new nor unacceptable ones to the individualized freshman composition faculty.

CONTROLS

Controls for this study were actually quite extensive. In our individualized composition courses all instructors use the same textbooks, all classes are held at tables in the same classroom area, all classes have virtually the same number of students in them, all have the same course requirements, all instructors use departmentally-written exams, and all use the same grading system and scale. Essentially, then, the only variables were the instructors conducting the course. Intentionally avoiding the issues of intructors' personal characteristics, teaching style and methodologies, knowledge of the subject matter and so forth, the questionnaire limits

the focus to the instructors' fulfillment of previously agreed-upon procedures. The goal was to determine whether there is any relationship between those variables and the student preference rate for each instructor.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Copies of these forms were distributed to all 15 faculty teaching individualized freshman composition in the Fall, 1979 quarter. Instructors were asked to have students complete the form during the next to last week before the end of the term, and all faculty received a memo specifying the evaluation procedures to be followed. Faculty left the room as students worked on the forms, and a previously appointed student collected them, sealed them in an envelope, and placed them in the department chair's mailbox. The department chair then gave the forms, still in sealed envelopes, to me for correlation and analysis.

RESULTS

On the chart on page 5 are my preliminary results. The left-hand column is a tabulation of the percentage of students who replied "yes" to question number two on the back of the form, "If the opportunity presented itself, would you select this instructor again?" Responses ranged from 100% affirmative responses to only 35%. Interesting to note, but not included in the study, were the number of students who responded quite precisely with answers like "never!", "no way', or "any time". Some simply left the answer space blank.

The thirteen numbers across the top of the chart correspond to the thirteen questions on the rating scale section of the questionnaire. The remaining numbers represent the average rating students gave the instructor on each question. Responses ranged from a perfect 5.0 rating, which over half the faculty received at least once, to a low of 3.3, for instructor number ten on the ninth question. Two of the fifteen faculty averaged lower than 4.0 on at least one question.

The Pearson coefficient of correlation was used to determine which, if any, of the teaching procedures evaluated had any effect on whether or not students would select the same instructor again. Page 6 charts those results. The question numbers are ranked from the items showing the highest relationship downward to those showing little

EVALUATION FORM - INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

INSTRUCTOR _____ SECTION NUMBER _____

COURSE NUMBER _____ DAY AND TIME _____

STUDENT INFORMATION

1. Estimate your interest in this subject ___High ___Moderate ___ Low

2. Estimate your achievement in this course ___A ___B ___C ___D ___F

3. Estimate your cumulative average to date. ___3.0-4.0 ___2.0-2.9 ___1.0-1.9 ___0-.9

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION

RATING SCALE - Rate your instructor on each of the items by circling the number which best describes your instructor's behavior. The meaning of each number is described below:

5 - This is the highest rating. It means your instructor does this almost always.

4 - Means your instructor behaves this way more than half the time but not as much as in in the highest rating.

3 - This means your instructor does this about half of the time.

2 - Means your instructor does this, but not often at all - only seldom.

1 - This is the lowest rating. It means your instructor almost never does this.

INSTRUCTOR POINTS TO CONSIDER

Circle the appropriate rating:

	Almost Always		Half Time		Almost Never
1. Conducts class the entire length of the period.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Makes you aware of the requirements of the course.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Tells you how much homework to complete in preparation for each class.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Explains material you've read but indicated you do not understand.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Explains mistakes you made on tests.	5	4	3	2	1

PLEASE TURN OVER AND COMPLETE BACK OF PAGE

	Almost Always		Half Time		Almost Never
6. Explains mistakes you made on exercises.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Grades and returns papers by the next class meeting.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Makes you aware of your grades as you progress.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Encourages you to progress through the material as rapidly as you can.	5	4	3	2	1
10. Makes it clear how your final grade will be determined.	5	4	3	2	1
11. Treats you with courtesy.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Returns to you during class to check on your progress when necessary.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Lets you know when you have done good work.	5	4	3	2	1

QUESTIONS

1. How many students, on the average, attended your class each meeting? _____

2. If the opportunity presented itself, would you select this instructor again? _____

3. Have you ever been absent? _____ If so, how many times? _____

4. How would you grade your instructor's performance in this course?
(Circle one) A B C D F

5. Do you prefer using a textbook that has exercises in it and that you write in? Or, do you prefer a text like one in Intro to Business or History that you do not write in? _____

_____

6. How many times, on the average, does your instructor work with you each class period?

_____

How many minutes, on the average, does your instructor work with you each class period?

_____

7. Do you think you learned something worthwhile this quarter? _____

_____

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	Almost Always		Half Time		Almost Never
6. Explains mistakes you made on exercises.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Grades and returns papers by the next class meeting.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Makes you aware of your grades as you progress.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Encourages you to progress through the material as rapidly as you can.	5	4	3	2	1
10. Makes it clear how your final grade will be determined.	5	4	3	2	1
11. Treats you with courtesy.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Returns to you during class to check on your progress when necessary.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Lets you know when you have done good work.	5	4	3	2	1

QUESTIONS

1. How many students, on the average, attended your class each meeting? _____

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3. Have you ever been absent? _____ If so, how many times? _____

4. How would you grade your instructor's performance in this course?
(Circle one) A B C D F

5. Do you prefer using a textbook that has exercises in it and that you write in? Or, do you prefer a text like one in Intro to Business or History that you do not write in? _____

6. How many times, on the average, does your instructor work with you each class period?

How many minutes, on the average, does your instructor work with you each class period?

7. Do you think you learned something worthwhile this quarter? _____

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PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS

% of students who responded affirmatively for each instructor*	Average Student Rating on Each Question												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
100%	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.82	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.0	4.82	5.0	5.0	5.0
100%	4.95	4.9	4.95	4.8	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.95	5.0	4.75	5.0	5.0	5.0
100%	4.38	4.89	4.25	4.62	5.0	4.62	4.87	4.75	4.62	4.87	4.75	4.87	4.75
91%	4.8	4.7	4.9	4.0	4.8	4.7	4.8	4.0	4.8	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.7
90.5%	4.76	4.8	4.71	4.65	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.78	4.47	4.42	4.8	4.65	4.85
88%	5.0	4.75	4.71	4.75	4.85	4.83	4.16	4.85	4.8	4.66	5.0	4.85	4.85
86%	4.85	4.92	4.71	4.5	4.78	4.85	4.92	3.92	4.71	4.64	4.92	4.92	4.78
84%	4.67	4.89	4.86	4.52	4.83	4.69	4.88	4.27	4.58	4.54	4.94	4.65	4.79
81%	4.77	4.72	4.57	4.63	4.54	4.76	4.47	4.19	4.38	4.19	4.95	4.9	4.9
80%	4.6	4.2	4.0	3.9	4.5	4.3	3.8	3.67	3.3	3.4	4.4	4.4	4.2
71%	5.0	5.0	4.4	4.4	5.0	4.83	5.0	4.17	4.2	4.5	4.67	4.83	4.83
70%	4.82	5.0	4.29	4.94	4.82	5.0	5.0	4.75	4.88	4.75	4.88	4.88	4.88
68%	4.59	4.86	4.57	4.32	4.76	4.95	4.35	4.32	4.75	4.6	4.35	4.55	4.95
66%	5.0	4.7	4.4	4.6	4.9	4.89	5.0	4.67	4.56	4.44	4.89	4.67	4.89
35%	4.65	4.76	4.65	4.13	4.63	4.65	5.0	4.65	4.69	4.19	4.73	4.53	4.76

*total 15 instructors

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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Rank order of items: Pearson coefficient of correlation

Meaning Of Correlation Coefficient	Correlation	Question Number	Question Content
Substantial or marked relationship	.545	Item 12	Returns to check progress.
	.520	Item 5	Explains mistakes you made on tests.
	.445	Item 4	Explains material you've read but don't understand.
LOW: relationship present but slight	.370	Item 3	Tells you how much homework to complete.
	.366	Item 10	Clarifies final grading determination
	.362	Item 11	Treats you with courtesy.
	.298	Item 1	Conducts class entire time.
	.253	Item 6	Explains mistakes you made on exercises.
Very low or negligible relationship	.154	Item 13	Lets you know when you've done good work.
	.150	Item 2	Makes you aware of course requirements.
	.106	Item 9	Encourages you to progress rapidly.
	.102	Item 8	Makes you aware of your grades as you progress.
	-.028	Item 7	Grades and returns papers by next class.

or no relationship at all. Three questions, numbers 12, 5, and 4, revealed a substantial correlation with the student preference. Most of the procedures rated fell into the low or very low category.

DISCUSSION

The data do reveal, then, some relationships to student preferences. Students do appear to consider an instructor's returning to them, rather than simply monitoring their independent work, of the highest importance in an individualized structure. Also significant to students is an instructor's explaining errors students made on tests, perhaps reflective of the old teaching method of going over tests after they have been graded. Even though students may appear to be interested only in the final grade itself, this study seems to indicate that students do prefer to have the instructors explain students' mistakes as well. Students also consider it important that instructors explain material students have read but do not understand. Assuming that students read assignments in the first place, the desire to have further explanation may be due to the "newness" of the subject matter to the students. Perhaps they simply have been unexposed to the material in their previous educational backgrounds and therefore need oral and additional visual recapitulation to understand. Then too, it may be that students' reading skills are inadequate for the level on which their texts are written, although our remedial reading courses are pre-requisites for students who place into them. Naturally, students who cannot comprehend the text must have it explained before they can hope to master it.

Reflection on the three most important items reveals a characteristic these procedures seem to share: they all stress a student preference for a personalized, nurturing atmosphere. None of the top three items can realistically be done by a teaching machine or by handouts; they all seem to require a person. Also, each of these does seem to require a small enough class size to enable the instructor to actually "return" to students to check on their progress. Larger classes, of course, simply preclude this.

The results also showed some surprises, at least to me. Students do not seem to find immediate feedback in the form of rapid grading and returning of papers a factor. Indeed, this item, number 7, was least significant of all in relation to student preferences. Another grouping of items that showed very low or negligible relationship was that of making students aware of their requirements and their progress, items 8 and 2. Interesting to note here is that these two procedures are somewhat mechanized ones that could be achieved by handouts or grading sheets. Two items that, in contract, do appear to demand a personalized approach, yet student evaluations showed a very low relationship, are items 13 and 9, both of which are supportive and reinforcing of positive performance. This study may indicate that students value their own understanding and achievement more highly than they value encouragement and motivation from the instructor.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, then, the results of this study indicate a relationship between certain teaching procedures and the degree of student preference for the instructors who employ those procedures in an individualized composition program. The three procedures most highly related to preference of instructor all embody the qualities of attentiveness and caring, but in an instructional mode, one directed towards actually helping students learn and master material. The implied desirability for a close and personalized relationship may suggest further study of the relationship of these factors to class size and the one to one relationship in general.

Undoubtedly, many other factors contribute to why students prefer some teachers over others; probably personality traits would figure largely. Investigation into these and other variables may be in order. But it is clear that it is more than a matter of personalities alone. Certain procedures do make a difference. And given the challenging goal of helping today's college freshmen learn to communicate more effectively in writing, it may be helpful for us to know all we can about the factors that can contribute to reaching that goal.